

VEL  
VE

禪

CH'AN  
NEWS  
LETTER

PROCESSED

MAR 2 1 1996  
GTU LIBRARY

No. 114 March, 1996

**Teacher-Advisor**  
(Shih-fu) Venerable  
Master Sheng-yen

**Editor**  
Harry Miller

**Staff**  
Guo Chou Shi, Guo-gu Shi,  
Giora Carmi, Lisa  
Commager, Chris Marano,  
Linda Peer, Alan Rubinstein,  
Nora Ling-yun Shih, Ming-  
yee Wang, Dorothy Weiner

## Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's Method of Complete Penetration Through the Sense Organ of Hearing

A talk on the *Surangama Sutra* given by Master Sheng-yen on November 19, 1995

In the section of the *Surangama Sutra* we have been reading, the Buddha questioned twenty-five bodhisattvas about the methods they used to attain Complete Penetration. We have now come to the paragraph in which Avalokitesvara speaks:

*"Thereupon Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva rose from his seat, prostrated himself with his head at the feet of the Buddha and declared: 'I still remember that long before numbers of eons countless as the sand grains in the Ganges, a Buddha called Avalokitesvara appeared in the world. When I was with Him I developed the Bodhi Mind and, for my entry into Samadhi, I was instructed by Him to practice meditation by means of the organ of hearing.'"*

Avalokitesvara tells about the distant past, countless eons ago. Even one eon is an extremely long period of time. At this remote time he encountered a Buddha whose name was also Avalokitesvara, and it was this Buddha who taught him how to practice.

It is Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva who speaks. Who is he? Among other things, he is a major bodhisattva (a Buddhist saint) in the Western Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha. In fact, he is heir to the position of Buddha in that Buddhaland. When Amitabha passes into Parinirvana, Avalokitesvara will be the Buddha of this Western Pure Land. Perhaps the name will be changed then. Or maybe there is some obscure clause in the constitution of the Western Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha, that says, "No name changes!" What do you think?

When will Avalokitesvara become the Buddha of the Western Pure Land? This is an interesting question, because the name "Amitabha" means "infinite life," or, "immeasurable lifetime." Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva was enlightened and became a bodhisattva an unimaginably long time ago. He may yet wait many more eons before he attains full Buddhahood. Fortunately, he is extremely patient. He is content as a bodhisattva. After all, he has no attachment to the idea of becoming a Buddha. It is only we ignorant sentient beings who are attached to the idea of becoming Buddhas.



GySh

This is a crucial point to remember. A bodhisattva has no anticipation or expectation of attainment for him or herself. Avalokitesvara is not concerned about becoming a Buddha. A bodhisattva simply dedicates his or her efforts to helping sentient beings.

When Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva was with Avalokitesvara Buddha, he aroused Bodhi Mind, the aspiration to attain the highest enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Once he had done this, the Buddha Avalokitesvara taught him a method of contemplation and practice using the organ of hearing by which he was able to enter Samadhi.

The Samadhi referred to here is the same as enlightenment. It is what is referred to in Ch'an as "illuminating the mind and seeing one's nature." The word "samadhi" has several meanings in Buddhist sutras. Most commonly, it refers to deep meditative absorption or concentration. Dhyana also refers to that state. Such samadhi can be attained by practitioners seeking worldly benefits, in which case it is part of worldly dharma and worldly practice. Meditative absorption samadhi

can also be part of a practice which transcends worldly phenomena. Both Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhists practice samadhi of this nature.

What are the differences among these samadhis? Mahayana samadhi is attained by Mahayana bodhisattvas. Beings in this state remain in samadhi during daily activities. Whether they give Dharma talks, help sentient beings, meditate, make trades on the floor of a stock exchange,

or engage in any other activity, Mahayana Bodhisattvas remain in samadhi.

How does this differ from the state of mind of an ordinary sentient being? A bodhisattva has no attachment to or concern about what he does or the results of what he does. He has no vexations, nor does he experience emotions, such as happiness, sadness, anger, and excitement, as ordinary sentient beings do. Helping sentient beings is his only concern, and he naturally does whatever is necessary to bring them peace and help them progress in the Dharma.

There are two kinds of Hinayana arahats (a Hinayana practitioner who has reached a state of enlightenment). One kind attains arahatship through samadhi, and the other attains this state without experiencing samadhi. Like Mahayana bodhisattvas, those who attain arahatship through samadhi are free from vexations, both in meditation and in daily life. They are free from self attachment. However they differ from bodhisattvas in that they do not have the aspiration to help sentient beings. Such arahats tend to spend their time in meditation.

When one enters worldly samadhi, there seem to be no vexations and no emotional fluctuations or moods. But self-centeredness remains. This is very different from the samadhi of the arahat, in which all self-centeredness has been eliminated. A practitioner in the state of deep concentration of worldly samadhi may feel as if he is liberated from all vexations, but once he stops meditating the power of his samadhi will subside, and once again he will experience vexations. How will he respond in that case? He may return to meditation to avoid the vexations of daily life. This behavior is similar to that of the arahat, but for a different reason. The arahat returns to meditation not because he experiences vexations — he does not — but only because there is nothing left for him to do. This is because, unlike the bodhisattva, he has not vowed to help all sentient beings.

Meditative absorption samadhi often entails dwelling on, or contemplating, an idea. Concentration is reached through contemplation practice. Hearing is not usually associated with this kind of samadhi practice. However the sutra does not speak of meditative absorption, it is refers to the samadhi which is enlightenment.

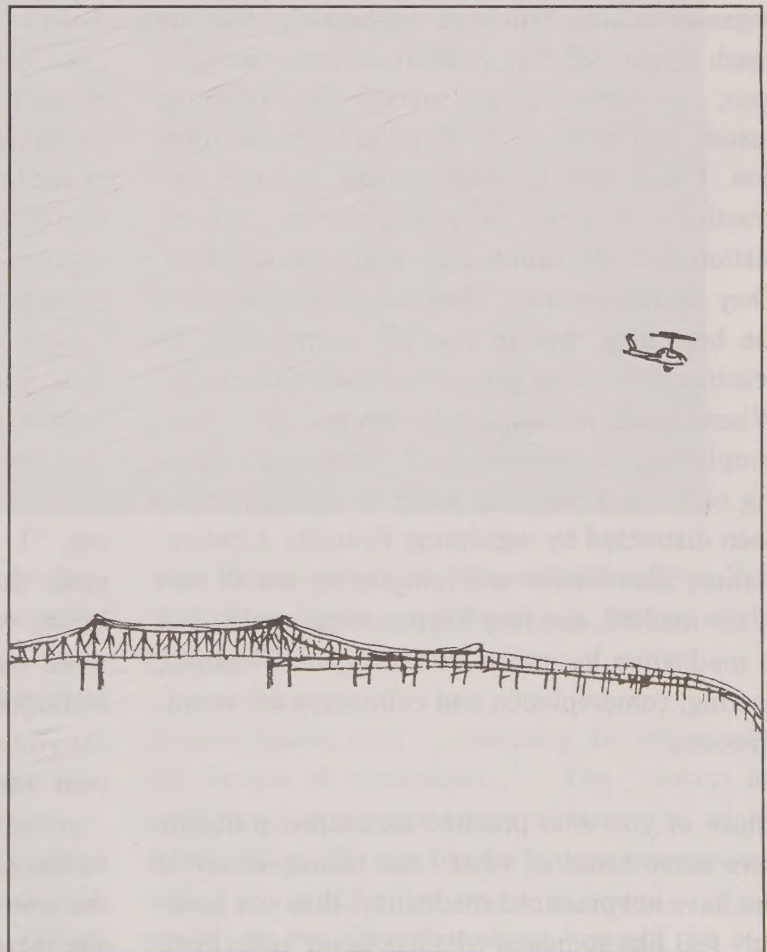
In the Sutra, Avalokitesvara goes on to say,

*At first by directing the organ of hearing into the stream of meditation, both the stream and the subject which enters become quiescent. Both movement and stillness became clearly non-existent.*

The method that the Buddha Avalokitesvara taught the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is this: first simply hear, go on to contemplation, and then to practice. You begin by hearing or listening

to sound as you ordinarily would. Eventually, you progress to listening to the sound without sound, that is, silent sound. This happens when the practitioner and sound are no longer separate. At that point sound does not exist as such, but the practitioner still continues to hear. (In this case I am using “hear” and “listen” interchangeably.)

Eventually, your physical and/or mental energy is no longer sufficient to maintain this state, and you stray from the state of non-separation from sound. This loss of energy also happens when you use other methods of practice. For example, if you use the method of counting breaths and you are doing well, you will reach a state in which your self, your breathing, and the counting are no longer separate. But you cannot remain in this state indefinitely. Eventually your physical



*Do you hear the helicopter?*

Nora Ling-yun Shih

and/or mental energy dwindles, and you drop away from that state. Then you need to use the method of contemplation.

When I say "contemplation," I do not mean that you use your reasoning mind to think about an idea. Contemplation means to develop and maintain a certain peaceful, quiet state of mind. Do not become discouraged, or anxious for any result. Contemplation and hearing are not really separate. You hear by using the continuous, quiet, state of mind which is contemplation.

The third part of meditation by means of the organ of hearing is practice, or cultivation. It requires that in all situations, at all times, you maintain hearing and contemplation.

I stated that when you meditate by means of the organ of hearing, you begin by hearing, then you reach a state of non-separation from what you hear, and eventually your energy is insufficient to sustain that state, and you go on to contemplation. I also said that you should maintain this practice at all times. In reality, hearing, contemplation and cultivation are simultaneous events. They are not separate. They may be sequential in the beginning, but as you get deeper into the practice, these three actions occur simultaneously. When I teach meditation, I often talk about contemplation, illumination, and "bring up," meaning to bring the method back up after you have been distracted by wandering thoughts. Contemplation, illumination and bringing up are all part of the method, and they happen sequentially. But in meditation by means of the organ of hearing, hearing, contemplation and cultivation are simultaneous.

Those of you who practice meditation probably have some sense of what I am talking about. If you have not practiced meditation, then you probably feel like someone who has never eaten beef, lamb or pork listening to someone else trying to

describe how different each one tastes. No amount of explaining can give you a concrete understanding of the difference. I can explain hearing, contemplation and cultivation in meditation to you, but if you want to know what beef, lamb or pork tastes like, I'll be of no help. Sorry, but I'm a vegetarian!

Avalokitesvara said, "...for my entry into Samadhi, I was instructed by Him (Avalokitesvara Buddha) to practice meditation by means of the organ of hearing." As I said earlier, in this case Samadhi means samadhi with wisdom, or enlightenment. How did Avalokitesvara enter into Samadhi? Through hearing, contemplation and cultivation. Through these he opened up wisdom. Entering into Samadhi and the opening of wisdom are simultaneous.

The next lines which Avalokitesvara said are extremely important. Even if you don't understand, at least you will have listened to them: "At first by directing the organ of hearing into the stream of meditation, this organ was detached from its object, and by wiping out the concept of both sound and stream-entry, both disturbance and stillness became clearly non-existent."

First you listen in the conventional way, with your ears, but eventually your ears stop functioning, and you use your mind to hear. When you close your eyes, can you still see? Sometimes we say, "I can see what you are saying." Do we mean that we are using our eyes or ears? And again, when we listen to someone talk, sometimes we become aware of a nonverbal message. In English we say we "read between the lines." Do you read between the lines with your ears or your mind?

In the past, in romantic relationships in China, the woman would often say the reverse of what she meant, and the man was expected to determine her true feelings from her tone and other

aspects of her expression. For instance, if you proposed to a woman, the woman might say, "I would prefer to marry a dog than to marry you," and you would then have to figure out what she was really saying. In this instance would you listen with your ears or your mind?

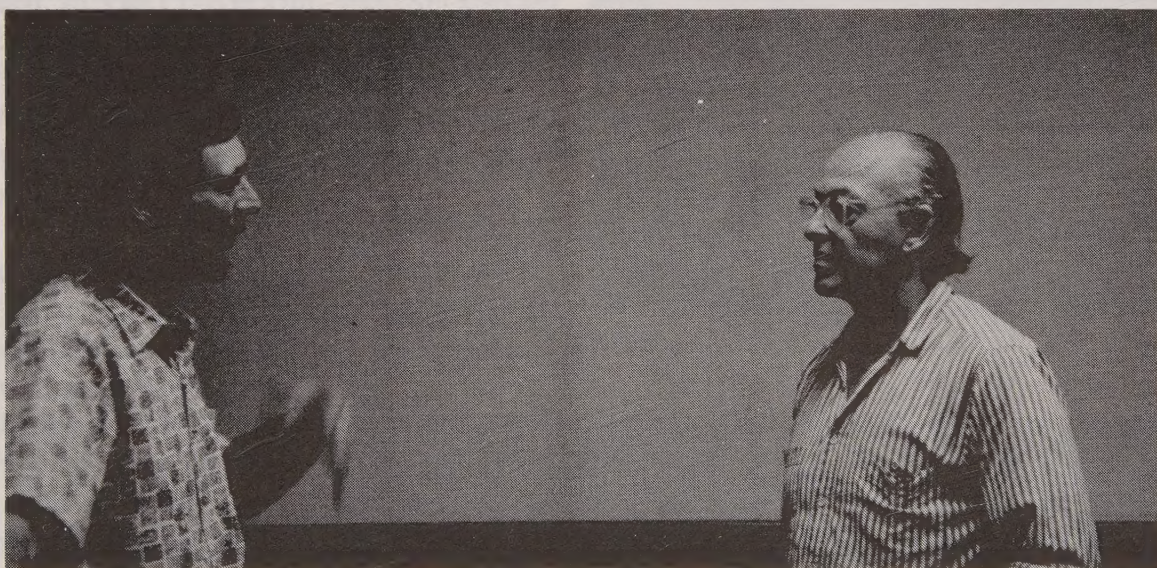
Let's return to meditation by means of the organ of hearing. When you engage in meditation by means of the organ of sound, initially you use your ears to hear, but at a certain point your sense organ of hearing ceases to function. Your mind continues to hear, however. You hear silent sound. Please don't get the wrong idea and conclude that there is some kind of mystical sound emanating from within your body. That is an outer path. It is not true Dharma practice.

"It's like thunder pounding on my ears." Real or false?

Perhaps the Masters were joking, but the sound could be real. If you clap with your mind, I can hear it with my mind.

Someone who is angry may strike something, a table, perhaps. If you are the object of his anger, then you might feel like he is striking directly at your heart or mind even though there is no physical contact. The sound of his striking the table might almost be painful. Have you experienced this kind of hearing? Most probably, we have all experienced something similar.

Returning to this practice: at a certain point there



Is there any sound to this silent sound? In this state, we can say that you maintain a continuity of energy. When this energy is maintained with no interruption, we can say that you are hearing.

Have you heard the koan from the Japanese Zen tradition about the sound of one hand clapping? One Master asked, "Can you hear me clapping with one hand?" and a second Master answered, "Yes, I heard it." The first Master asked, "What is this sound like?" and the second Master said,

is no longer separation between the subject, the one who is hearing, and the object, that which is heard. Still, hearing continues.

Avalokitesvara said, "...directing the organ into the stream of meditation..." The "stream of meditation" is the uninterrupted stream of silent sound. When the practitioner enters the uninterrupted stream of silent sound, or sound without sound, he has forgotten about himself, he has forgotten that he is in the stream, and he has

forgotten the stream itself.

Next Avalokitesvara said, "...both the stream and the subject which enters become quiescent. Both movement and stillness become clearly non-existent." This means that both the subject which enters the stream and the object, the stream which is entered, become quiescent. "Quiescent" describes a state of stillness, but the practitioner in that state has no perception or experience of stillness or movement.

This state in which there is no perception of stillness or movement is Mahayana Samadhi. The ordinary, worldly kind of samadhi is also a kind of stillness. But a practitioner in Mahayana Samadhi is not moved by the environment or by emotions. He has no intention of holding his mind still. There is no intentionality, and there is no movement whatsoever.

The state in which there is no perception of stillness or movement is beyond the state just described in the sutra, as "...directing the organ of

hearing into the stream of meditation, both the stream and the subject which enters become quiescent." This is called "entering the stream and forgetting the object" and it is a samadhi state which occurs during meditation. But when, "...both movement and stillness become clearly non-existent," when there is no perception of movement or stillness, this state persists at all times, during meditation or daily activities.

At this level of development you can do "Ch'an practice in the busy crossroads." This does not mean that you actually sit down and meditate in an intersection. It means that there is neither stillness nor movement in your mind, no matter what you do. You can eat ice cream, walk your dog, buy groceries, yet: "both disturbance and stillness become clearly non-existent." You should find this especially useful. Remember you can practice Ch'an all the time: at work, at home, even shopping through the aisles at your supermarket!



Dorothy Weiner

## News from the Center

Guo-gu Shi was in Stockholm, Sweden, from Jan. 17 through 22, to expand and strengthen a sitting group affiliated with the Ch'an Center. Guo-gu Shi was invited by Mr. Tomasz Huloj, who has been coming to retreats at the Center for some time. Guo-gu Shi gave a talk, and conducted a beginning meditation workshop and a one day retreat. The Stockholm sitting group was enthusiastic about practice, and would like Master Sheng-yen to visit Stockholm when he travels to a number of European countries, sometime in the next couple of years. Guo-gu Shi also visited Therivadan, Vajrayana and Zen Centers near Stockholm to gain an understanding of how Swedish people respond to the Buddhadharma.

Guo-yuan Shi was in Canada from Feb. 6 through Feb. 14. First he visited Hong Fa Temple in Toronto, where he gave a talk, led meditation and answered questions. Next he went to Vancouver, where he led the Blessing and Year End Gathering of the local branch of Dharma Drum Mountain. About 250 people attended. In Van Couver Guo-yuan Shi also led a meditation class attended by 60 people, and gave a special talk for the volunteers of the Dharma Drum Mountain branch. Finally he returned to Toronto to give a talk at the home of Ms. Mei Chuen Wang.



*Guo-yuan Shi at Hong Fa Temple*

Guo-chou Shi went to Houston, Texas on Feb. 16. That evening he met with about 40 practitioners informally, to answer questions about Ch'an practice and Buddhadharma. The next day he led a three hour meditation workshop, including sitting, and walking meditation, the exercises we do during retreats and instruction on how to apply one's method of meditation in a relaxed way. Participants found that the emphasis on relaxing the body and mind helped them enjoy and benefit from their meditation. Guo-chou Shi went on to Austin, Texas. He



*It snowed and snowed, but the usual suspects came anyway!  
(Bob and Libby, in this case)*

GySh

answered practitioners' questions in the evening and led a meditation workshop from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM the next day. Many of the participants had been practicing for some time, so Guo-chou Shi talked to them about the functions of the theories and techniques of meditation.

On Feb. 17 Guo-gu Shi gave an informal lecture and conducted a beginners' meditation workshop as part of the cultural program of the Seventh Annual Asian American Intercollegiate Conference, at Harvard University. He also visited the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center and talked to the founder, Larry Rosenberg.

Master Sheng-yen and about 250 disciples will make a pilgrimage to mainland China between April 22 and May 6. Guo-chou Shi and Guo-yuan Shi will also accompany him. Participants are all members of branches of Dharma Drum Mountain, and come from Canada, Taiwan and the United States. The purpose of the trip is to learn to work together and cooperate in a large group, to learn from each other, and to strengthen participants' commitment to the principles and ideals of Dharma Drum Mountain.

The Ch'an Sitting Group has become a membership organization! This group is intended to provide support for our practice, to encourage commitment to practice and to provide clear Ch'an teaching. Practitioners can now become members of the group, and receive benefits including individual guidance and discounts for retreats, and can participate in a half day retreat with interviews each month. Everyone is welcome to come to the sitting group, which meets on Friday nights for English speakers, whether they are members of the group or not. Please call the Center for more information.



*Master Sheng-yen and two photo assistants*

## Upcoming Events:

**Beginners' Meditation Workshops:** Saturday, March 9, April 20, or May 18, from 9 AM to 1 PM, in English. Methods of sitting and walking meditation, breathing, sleeping, yoga exercises and massage will be covered, as well as the theory and stages of meditation practice. Please call for further information and to register.

**Introductory One-day Meditation Retreat:** Saturday March 23 from 9 AM to 5 PM. Please call for further information and to register.

**One Day Ch'an Retreat:** April 6, and May 4, 9 AM to 8 PM. Please call for further information and to register.

**Two-day Ch'an Retreat:** March 15, 7 PM , to March 17, 5 PM. Please call for further information and to register.

**Seven Day Ch'an Retreats:** May 24 to 31, and June 28 to July 5. Please register well in advance of these retreats.

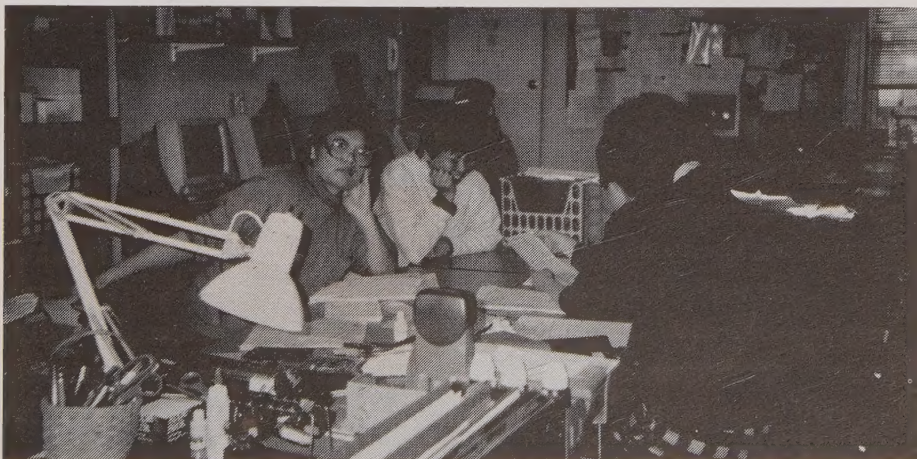
On May 7 or May 8 Master Sheng-yen will return to the Ch'an Center.

**Buddha's Birthday** will be celebrated on Sunday, May 12 at the Center. Activities will include bathing the baby Buddha and a special lecture by Master Sheng-yen. Children are especially invited.

On May 19 Master Sheng-yen will give a special public lecture at the Center.

The **Friday Night Ch'an Sitting Group**, conducted by four disciples of Master Sheng-yen, will meet on March 1, 8, 22, 29 and April 5, 12, 19 and 26 from 7 to 9 PM, followed by a half hour of socializing. Please call for further information. Master Sheng-yen will lead the Friday Night Group after his return in May.

Wed. night classes will resume in May. Master Sheng-yen will continue to comment on the



*Volunteers in the library/office*

## Ongoing Activities, except during retreats:

**Recitation Group:** Mon. evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 P.M. Amitabha Buddha recitation in Chinese, and prostrations.

**Group Meditation:** Tues. and Thurs. evenings from 7:30 to 9:00 P.M.

**Ch'an Sitting Group:** Fri. 7:00 P.M. to 9:00 P.M., with a social half hour until 9:30. An evening of sitting and walking meditation, with a short talk on the application of Ch'an to daily life or the concepts and methods of Ch'an. This is also an opportunity to ask Master Sheng-yen or one of the resident monks for guidance in practice. Please call for details.

**Sunday Program:** Meditation, chanting, vegetarian lunch, afternoon talk and afternoon meditation. 10:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M.

**First Saturday of each month:** One day Ch'an retreat, 9:00 A.M. to 8:00 P.M. Please call for details and to register.

**Last Saturday of each month:** Beginners' Meditation Workshop. In English: 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M. In Chinese 2:00 to 6:00. Please call for details and to register.

Ch'an Meditation Center  
Institute of Chung-Hwa Buddhist Culture  
90-56 Corona Avenue  
Elmhurst, New York 11373

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
FLUSHING, N.Y.  
PERMIT NO. 1120

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION LIBRARY (2474)  
SERIALS DEPARTMENT  
2400 RIDGE RD  
BERKELEY CA 94709-1212